



Owosso Downtown Historic District Commission

City of Owosso
<http://ci.owosso.mi.us/>

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February 23, 2016

Representative Ben Glardon
S-1189 House Office Building
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909

Mr. Glardon,

The Owosso Downtown Historic District Commission strongly favors retention of Michigan's Local Historic Districts Act—Public Act 169 of 1970, as amended in 1992—and opposes the changes to PA 169 proposed in House Bill 5232 and Senate Bill 720. The Owosso district was established with the State of Michigan in 2010, and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2014. Since then, PA 169, in its original form, has served Owosso as an invaluable tool promoting investment and development in our downtown district. The revisions to PA 169 pending in the state house and senate could severely impair the progress of such developments in communities that leverage historic buildings as among their most valuable instruments for civic renewal and growth.

Millions of dollars have been invested in more than a dozen projects in downtown Owosso under PA 169, all of them enabled or spurred by the advantages, protections, incentives and environment associated with establishment of the city's state and national historic districts. **Utilizing these programs, more than \$10 million in revitalization projects are slated for development in Owosso in the next two years.** Investors and developers openly state that benefits provided through these preservation initiatives were and are decisive elements in plans for redevelopment of the historic properties they own.

The stability inherent in a permanently established historic district assures investors that their capital projects are soundly established and will not be endangered according to a whim or shift in local government. The current rigorous procedures for both establishing and dissolving historic districts ensure that both these steps are taken with equal deliberation and community input. Revisions which would alter these procedures potentially disrupt district stability and deter owners from committing to invest. The proposed sunset clause has a similar effect, suspending districts in a perpetual state of legislative and fiscal insecurity.

The experience of the Owosso Downtown Historic District Commission confirms that the Secretary of the Interior's Standards provide the ideal set of guidelines for review boards evaluating proposed projects within a historic district. The standards are practical and explicit enough to serve as a consensus for discussions about project features, yet flexible enough to accommodate adjustments according to the specific conditions of the project under review. To abandon the Secretary's Standards, an acknowledged authoritative source in use across the United States, in favor of rules set by each district, would rob districts of their credibility, and deprive them of recourse to a single authoritative set of criteria and policies.

For these and other reasons, it is our belief that the current version of PA169 is a tool well calibrated for its purpose, and can only be damaged, and rendered less effective, if it is to be altered as proposed in the bills before the state legislature.

Sincerely,

The Owosso Downtown Historic Commission

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Scott Newman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "N".

Chairman Scott Newman